



THE ALABAMA VETERAN

SPRING 2021 ISSUE



ADVA NEWSLETTER

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ADVA
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving
America's Finest"*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

It has been a busy year here at the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA). As the country and state continue battling COVID-19, there are signs we're moving in the right direction, and that progression should be celebrated.

The ADVA continues making major positive strides at all four of our State Veterans Homes. In December, we had needlepoint bi-polar ionization systems installed to control pathogens inside Floyd E. "Tut" Fann, William F. Green, Bill Nichols, and Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Homes. Studies show a 99.4% reduction rate on COVID-19 surface strain within 30 minutes when using the bi-polar ionization machines.

We welcomed Republic of Korea Consul General Young-jun Kim to the ADVA in March and graciously accepted the gift of 10,000 KF94 masks, which were distributed at our State Veterans Homes. This gift ensured necessary resources to further promote safety during the pandemic.

Our momentum fighting COVID-19 at our State Veterans Homes didn't end there. Residents and staff members started getting vaccinated through Walgreens in late December as part of a national program. There were three clinics that spanned through March that offered the Pfizer vaccine for those who signed up.

In April, all four facilities took another step forward by establishing the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program, making them among the state's first long-term health care facilities to participate in this program. The program allows each State Veterans Home to receive, store, and administer vaccinations directly to residents and staff members without relying on outside sources. Vaccination clinics began later that month and all had positive reports of administering vaccinations to at least 10 individuals at a time.

We are also working on great things that are happening in the future. We recently announced the award of a \$39 million federal grant for the construction of the fifth State Veterans Home, which will be in Enterprise. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awarded the grant that will cover 65 percent of the home's construction cost. The ADVA will cover 35 percent of the estimated \$60 million facility that will provide quality long-term care to Alabama Veterans.

Groundbreaking is planned to take place later this year, and we are planning for construction to begin early next year.

We are still accepting nominations for the naming of our fifth State Veterans Home until mid-June. Williams Blackstock Architects in Birmingham has been tasked with creating the facility's design, which will be unveiled on July 9 at the next State Board of Veterans Affairs meeting.

This spring, we are also excited to announce that Washington County now has a Veterans Service Office, where Veterans can go to apply for VA benefits and access career and small business development opportunities. We now have 60 county Veterans Service Offices, with 10 opening in the last year.

As we continue moving forward, I know I speak for the entire Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs when I say it is an honor to serve "America's Finest."

ADVA

COMMISSIONER

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Wendi Findley—Executive Assistant

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OPERATIONS

Jeff Newton

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Robert Horton

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

Beverly Gebhardt

VETERANS HOMES PROGRAMS

Kim Justice—Executive Director

ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Kayla Kyle—Program Manager

ACCOUNTING

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ADVA APPOINTS NEW ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) Commissioner Kent Davis has appointed Jeff Newton to serve as the Department's Assistant Commissioner of Operations and Chief of Staff.

Newton is responsible for departmental operations, personnel administration, Veterans' services, training, and information technology.

"I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to serve our Veterans and to work alongside the dedicated men and

women who lead the ADVA in providing the highest quality of care and services to those who have served our country," Newton said.

Newton joins the ADVA after 40 years of military service with the Alabama Air National Guard. He recently served as Director of the Joint Staff, Alabama Military Department, leading multiple major military functions including logistics management, cyber security assistance, domestic support operations during state emergencies, risk management and legislative affairs.

Newton has command experience at various unit levels to include serving as squadron and group commander, and vice commander of the 117th Air Refueling Wing based in Birmingham. Newton enlisted in the Alabama Air National Guard in 1980 and received his commission in 1989. He rose through the ranks to brigadier general and retired from the Alabama Air National Guard in February.

Newton is a graduate of the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base; Space Executive Course, National Security Space Institute; and the Joint and Combined War Fighting School, National Defense University. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Business degree from Samford University and a Master of Business Administration degree from Auburn University.



NOMINATIONS FOR NAMING FIFTH STATE VETERANS HOME

We are still accepting nominations for the fifth State Veterans Home. Nomination packages must be received by State Board of Veterans Affairs Secretary Wendi Findley at Wendi.Findley@va.alabama.gov no later than noon on June 14, 2021.

Nomination forms can be found on our website at www.va.alabama.gov.

ADVA AWARDED CONSTRUCTION GRANT FOR FIFTH STATE VETERANS HOME

The State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA) Veterans Homes Committee has been awarded a \$39 million federal grant for the construction of the state's fifth veterans home that will be built in Enterprise. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awarded the grant to the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) that will cover 65 percent of the home's construction cost. The ADVA will cover 35 percent of the estimated \$60 million facility that will provide quality long-term care to Alabama Veterans.

Groundbreaking is planned to take place later this year, with construction beginning in early 2022. The facility is expected to open in 2023. It will be 182,000 square feet and house 175 residents. Once in full operation, it will provide jobs for more than 200 people.

"We can only see this as a blessing, a win-win situation for everyone. This project puts people to work, adds to our local economy, and, best of all, allows our community to give back in some small way to a group of dedicated Americans who have sacrificed for us and this great country where we live," said Enterprise Mayor William Cooper.

The site of the facility will be on 108 acres in Enterprise off Highway 51 just north of Yancey Parker Industrial Park. This location was chosen largely because of the considerable Veteran population in Coffee County. Studies indicate the county, and Enterprise in particular, will see a significant growth in the Veteran population in coming years.

Williams Blackstock Architects in Birmingham has been tasked with creating the facility's design. Working with ADVA officials, the design will be unveiled on July 9 when the SBVA hosts its board meeting in Enterprise.

ALABAMA VETERANS RECEIVE GIFT FROM REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) welcomed Consul General of the Republic of Korea Young-jun Kim in mid-March to accept a gift of 10,000 KF94 masks that will be distributed to the state's four veterans homes.

"We are so grateful for this donation as the past year has been especially challenging with the COVID-19 pandemic," said ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis.

"We humbly accept this gift that will make a tremendous difference in the lives of our residents and staff at our State Veterans Homes by providing them with a high level of protection."

Kim presented Davis with the masks and a letter from Republic of Korea Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun thanking American Korean War Veterans and their families for helping Korea defend freedom and secure peace seven decades ago. Kim said the donation of masks is a small token from South Korea to honor Veterans who fought in the Korean War.

The KF94 masks are made in the Republic of Korea with the KF representing "Korean filter" and the "94" indicating 94 percent filtering efficacy.



AROUND THE STATE

ALABAMA STATE VETERANS HOMES ESTABLISH CDC COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAM



The Alabama State Veterans Homes have taken the required steps to establish the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program, continuing to create and maintain the safest environment for facilities' residents and employees. The program allows each of the four facilities to receive, store, and administer vaccinations directly to residents and staff members without relying on outside sources.

Bill Nichols, William F. Green, Floyd E. "Tut" Fann, and Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Homes are among the first long-term care facilities in Alabama to establish the program.

The CDC recently licensed HMRx, the company that operates the homes' pharmacies, as a COVID-19 vaccination provider after meeting all program requirements. Each home has an upgraded pharmacy vaccination freezer to store COVID-19 vaccines, a state-of-the-art Digital Data Logger (DDL) to monitor the freezer's temperature 24 hours a day, and is enrolled in the federal vaccine allocation program.

Vaccinations are ordered through enrollment with Managed Health Care Associations, Inc. (MHA) and the state allocation program with the Alabama Department of Public Health. Each State Veterans Home has trained clinical staff that will administer the vaccine.

The CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program lessens the possibility of residents becoming exposed to the virus by receiving the vaccine, and allows flexibility in scheduling appointments. Each facility held its first clinic in late April.

"Establishing the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program in our State Veterans Homes is a great benefit to our residents and staff members," ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis said. "We, along with the rest of the state and country, have seen the dangers of COVID-19 and have been proactive with practicing the proper protocol to provide a safe environment for our veterans, staff and families."

NEW PUTTING GREEN ADDED FOR RESIDENTS AT COL. ROBERT L. HOWARD STATE VETERANS HOME

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs joined the Alabama Golf Course Superintendents Association in late February for a ribbon cutting of the Wayne Kendrick Putting Green at the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City. Kendrick, a golf enthusiast and resident of the home, was the driving force initiating the special project in the spring of 2020.

The artificial green was constructed by Ken Healy of Ideal Synthetic Surfaces with volunteer labor from the Alabama Golf Course Superintendents.

Donations from the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans and others in the turfgrass industry made building the green possible.

AROUND THE STATE

WORLD WAR II, KOREAN WAR VETERAN CELEBRATES 97TH BIRTHDAY WITH PARADE IN MILLBROOK

Dr. Donald E. Hayhurst celebrated his 97th birthday on April 1 with a commendation from Gov. Kay Ivey, complete with a parade and ceremony organized by the City of Millbrook and the American Red Cross.

Hayhurst was drafted when he was 18 years old to serve in the Army during World War II. In June 1944, his tank recovery unit landed on Omaha Beach 10 days after the Allies invaded Normandy. The unit supported combat missions during the Battle of the Bulge and Rhineland. At the end of WWII, Hayhurst received a field commission to first lieutenant and was later recalled into service during the Korean War.

After his military service, Hayhurst earned his PhD in political science at the University of Pittsburgh, and would later establish the department of political science at Auburn University as a full professor.

Hayhurst returned to France in Nov. 2018 with one of his former students at Auburn and toured the five landing sites for Allied Forces during World War II, bringing home sand from Omaha Beach.



WASHINGTON CO. VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE OPENS

Veterans in Washington County now have a place where they can go to apply for VA benefits and access career and small business development opportunities as well. Officials held a ribbon cutting ceremony in late March at the Washington County Public Library in Chatom for the grand opening of the Washington County Veterans Service Office and the Career Readiness and Small Business Development Center.

Veterans and their dependents can schedule an appointment with the Washington County Veterans Service Office by calling 251-847-3966. The office is open in the Washington County Public Library on Thursdays and Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

CONGRATULATIONS!



Veterans Service Officer Jon Doolittle (right) receives a retirement plaque after over 10 years of service to Veterans in Fayette, Pickens and Lamar counties.



Jackson Co. Veterans Service Officer Mike Maynor (left) retired after serving more than 17 years with the ADVA. 6

AROUND THE STATE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AWARDS COMMISSIONER'S EXCELLENCE AWARD



Kathryn Fuller was presented the 2020 Commissioner's Excellence Award, which is awarded for the best overall performance or service that improves the quality of service and/or image of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA).

Kathryn is a licensed nursing home administrator and has been the Director at Bill Nichols State Veterans Home for more than a decade. She spent a majority of 2020 on the frontlines of battling COVID-19, with the first cases coming in April when so much was still unknown about the pandemic. Resources were scarce and testing was almost impossible.

Kathryn was never "working from home," working long hours daily at the veterans home—including on weekends. She put her personal health at risk to serve the Veterans at Bill Nichols. She worked tirelessly to assist in coordinating and troubleshooting issues to include obtaining testing, tracking, and reporting of cases, setting up COVID-19 positive quarantine units, and communicating with other entities to include the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, FEMA, the Alabama Department of Public Health, the Alabama Emergency Management Agency, and Tallapoosa County EMA. Fortunately, as the pandemic continued, the facility was able to get assistance for supplemental staffing from the VA, more testing opportunities at a faster pace, and much quicker turnaround of results.

"Kathryn continues to be a positive representative of the ADVA. We are fortunate to have her as the Director of Bill Nichols State Veterans Home," said Kim Justice, Executive Director of the State Veterans Homes Program.

2020 ADVA EMPLOYEE AWARDS



Rachel Griffith was named the Support Person of the Year after consistently demonstrating dedication to the ADVA through hard work, compassion, and willingness to be a team player. She is always willing to help her coworkers with tasks inside and outside her job description.

On more than one occasion, Rachel has assisted coworkers when they needed assistance or when they were unable to attend their work duties for extended periods of time. In addition to ReAnna Missildine, Rachel took the task of handling the State Combined Campaign for the department, working to find ways to encourage participation among ADVA staff members.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rachel has exhibited resilience in her job duties by ensuring that things are handled smoothly and efficiently. She is always friendly, pleasant, and a team player with all of her coworkers, both at headquarters and in the field.



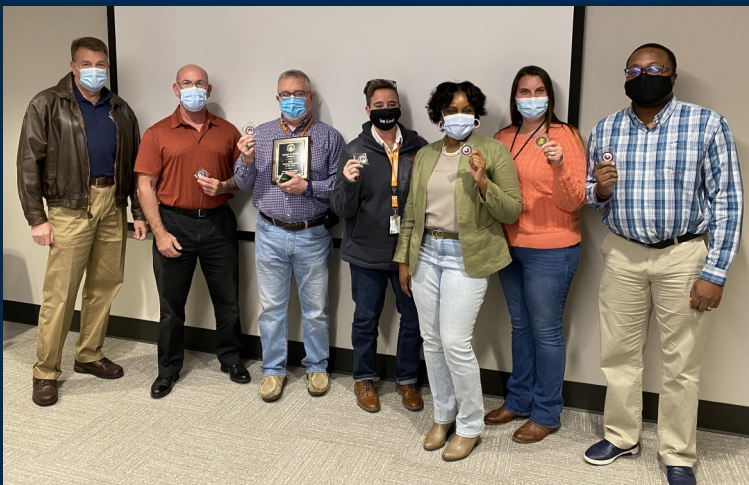
The Distinguished Service Award was awarded to Paula Lawson, who found new and inventive ways to maintain her normal high level of customer service in the Appeal & Review Division within the VA Regional Office.

Despite the unforeseen ejection from the division's work location that created a lack of access to A&R's normal shared hard drive location provided by the VA, Paula facilitated the re-creation of months' worth of paperwork without hesitation.

Paula has taken the opportunity to expand the scope of her work to accept greater responsibilities for monitoring daily accreditation and access requests by developing a tracking system that ensures items have been assigned and completed in a timely manner.

Paula worked through many of the old ways of accomplishing these tasks while also adapting new technologies to allow the division to not rely on the VA for accessing stored data.

Her skills in returning the simplest calls, to interactions with district managers and coworkers, and her ability to communicate with the federal VA and other organizations makes Paula a great representative of the ADVA.



The entire Appeal & Review Division team was named Veterans Advocates of the Year for its level of commitment, dedication, and tenacity shown during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic greatly impacted the Board of Veterans Affairs (BVA) and its ability to provide appellants with hearings they requested. In July 2020, the BVA released its virtual hearing platform and the ADVA was the first organization in Alabama to jump on board with the technology. A&R was able to have hearing personnel up to speed on the program and worked directly with the BVA scheduling unit to begin a full slate of hearing for July and August.

"The simple fact the personnel of the A&R Division transitioned from their normal work environment to a work-from-home environment in a matter of days and continued to provide the same level of service to our veterans, their families, and support to our service officers in the field is an outstanding accomplishment," said A&R Division Manager Mark Sullivan.